



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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THE FÉSOLE CLUB PAPERS.

BY W. G. COLLINGWOOD.

XXII. EYES.

"THE eye, it cannot choose but see," says the poet. A drawing-teacher must be forgiven if he has his doubts on the subject. The ordinary eye manages to be blind on most occasions, and when it condescends to open, it blinks, and dreams, and squints, and shirks to any extent, rather than go to the trouble of looking. Rather, perhaps one ought to say, than learn the Art of Seeing. We begin to learn that art before we begin to learn the art of talking; but there is many a one that can talk like a professional, who is but a bungling amateur in the art of seeing things as they are.

A great hindrance to our progress is the lazy habit of using other people's spectacles. Anything that comes between us and the facts, any acquired prepossession—you may dignify it as you please with the title of style, or method, or system—anything that interferes with earnest personal examination of the original truth, is just a lens that distorts your vision or a smoked glass that blurs it. Do you want to know? Go and look. That is, I am afraid, the only thing I have to say; and all my papers are variations on the same theme.

"What copies do you recommend?" says the student. "Nature," says the teacher. "But it is so hard," says the student. "Take a little bit at a time," says the teacher. "But it won't keep still," says the student. "Try something that will," says the teacher. "But I can't match the colours," says the student. "Then do it in pencil," says the teacher. "But I can't get the shapes," says the student. "Look and see what they are," says the teacher. "They are so complicated," says the student. "Take one at a time," says the teacher. "You can draw a round with a three-penny-bit, and put a dot in the middle of it, and there is your eye begun!"

"But I have heard of some copies that show one how to do it all."

Well, now, I have in my hand certain "copies" which are widely sold to art students, and among them here are some eyes. It would be flattery to say they were pretty. Do you know what "nubbly" means? Perhaps we should spell it "knubbly" or "knob-ly," which Nature never is. To prove it, call a child, and give him chocolate enough to keep him quiet for a while. He is Nature, you understand.

You don't see any "nubbliness" about nature's eyes. There are lights and darks that model them, but broad and soft, not cut up into seams and lines; and where there are lines, the gradation and variety of relief softens them away into the general undulation which our "copy" seems to have omitted. The three-penny-bit outline, the ring of the iris, when you come to look at it in nature, is wonderfully soft, like the edge of a cloud upon the deep blue sky behind it: for the iris is not a patch painted upon the eye-ball, but a limpid well, as it were, sunk below the soft marbly surface of the white of the eye; and the black pupil is a lower deep within that. The ring round the edge of the iris is not a fixed black line, but the shadow from the brim of the well, so to speak; and in some lights the shadow is not seen: in any light it is as soft as the shadow from the fern of a fountain's brink upon the pebbles at the bottom of the water. And somewhere in the depth of that well you see light transmitted through the water, and focussed in translucent brilliancy among the mysteries of the depths. And on the surface of the water there floats a bright spark, reflected from the sky, and outshining the dim white marble of the fountain's edge, just as the bright gleam on a ripple of the lake outshines the white pebbles of the shore. And above the iris a fringe of lashes, like dark cypress foliage or laurel overshadowing a way-side well, casts a shade deep as twilight, and intensifies that bright star of sky-glitter by the breadth of its gloom and the softness of its gradation.

A circle and a dot were right for a beginning; but you see we have to put in a little more before we have got our iris drawn. "A little more, and how much it is," but you see it in Nature. "A little less,"—look at your "copy"—"and what worlds away." It is even more misleading to study eyes from the cast. You get capital practice in

proportions and modelling of limbs from the antique; but eyes are just what sculpture cannot represent.

Now some more chocolate for Master Nature, and a look at the eye-lids.

Square drawing—that is the first thing you see. You know now what it means; that the curves are not limp, but shoot, and swerve, and recover, and recoil, with living energy, in such fashion that they can best be represented by sketching each segment of their career as a straight line; and when the harmony of these notes of direction is accomplished, and the main pattern blocked out, as if it were some beautiful crystal shape, then the rounding and softening can be given afterwards as to the water-worn pebble.

There is the upper eye-lid, which, in a pretty eye, is not lost on its upper edge, though the line that bounds it need not be so strongly marked as it is by some of the older portrait painters. See how cleverly those two—so nearly parallel—lines are varied. Look at me, Master Nature! When his eye is fully open, the eye-lashes are lifted a little just over the pupil, almost to a point, and above them the upper edge of the eye-lid is level. The under edge again, almost lost in the softness of the lashes in the middle of its length, comes out sharp and clear where it runs down crisply to the little rosy pip between eye and nose: while, above it, the top line of the eye-lid loses itself in a hollow, and only comes out into definiteness where the under line is softest. This alternation and contrast you will observe in any natural eye, though the details of it are seen in infinite rearrangement. To draw eyes beautifully is no great mystery, when you have once looked well into a single example, and read the secret of its structure.

One more look, Master Nature! You see, the bright spark and the black pupil are the extremes of contrast. Compared with them how marvellously gentle all the rest of the lights and darks are. And yet the whole eye is not a flat thing painted on the face; and in drawing it you must remember its solidity—the roundness of the eye-ball in itself—which you see all the more in the profile view, and the substance of the lids that overlie it and follow its undulation, retreating in exquisite contrast with the projection of the brow above.

But all this is got by breadth of modelling; and when you come to shade after the first sketching of the lines, look for the masses,—quiet half-tones of broad spreading dark, dim tracts of fading light, and the pop of black and white to throw them all into the sweetest of mystery. When you have noted that down with a soft pencil and a good look at Nature, you will not care much for your nubbly “copy.”

When you have looked long enough you will see that the softness is not, in nature, the result of blurred or clouded edges, though the edges are not hard lines; nor is the tenderness of effect the result of weakness and want of force in dark and light. Nature puts together perfectly clean edges, and astonishingly strong tones, and yet the whole is delicate and soft, because the edges are varied in relief (dark and light not equally opposed all along the two sides of the outline) and because the tones are very broadly and softly gradated. This true finish of Nature's work is what you have to look for and imitate.

Do not make the eye-lashes stubbly, but treat them as you have already treated the woolly-bear and the cat's back: and notice the shadow they cast on the eye-ball. If you put the bright spark close up under the eye-lashes your eye will stare. See that the outline of the iris is not hard, but varied in relief, as it goes up into the shadow of the eye-lashes, and comes down into the delicate shading of the eye-ball near the lower lid.

Then finally, the painting, of which there is little to say, now that the mouth has been done. It is hardly possible to paint an eye without much retouching and careful rectification of chance errors. But the aim in painting should be to lay the matched colour clearly, and to take out the tender lights from the damp tint in our usual way. For if ever clearness and delicacy are needed, it is here.

Two studies at least should be done, the side view and the front view; for the side view, as you have found in doing the mouth, is quite another story. Downright observation and nothing else will give you the shape of the pupil and iris seen in profile. But when you can draw that, and the eyelids in perspective, and model them into roundness, and tint them into living flesh, there will be no more to learn from printed talk about them.

We began our work to illustrate Mr. Ruskin's method in his book called "The Laws of Fésole," and though we have drifted away from the subject matter of that book, we can still claim to be followers of its principles, and we can take to ourselves whatever crumbs of encouragement his maxims afford. Our club members should know the "Aphorisms" by heart, and this month they will prove the truth of many a searching remark. One, namely XXII., ought to comfort them. "When you would do *better* than your best, put your full strength out, the moment you feel a difficulty. You will spoil your drawing to-day, but you will do better than your to-day's best, to-morrow."

HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION.

(Discussion.)

MADAM,—A long connection with High Schools has given me reason greatly to value their work, but I am afraid that many of their *alumnæ* are still somewhat to seek in the matter of manners. I quite agree with Miss Beer that manners are primarily the business of the parents, and that the ill manners of the children are as a rule due to the ill manners, or else the neglect, of their homes. But the same is the case with health and with overwork, and yet the mistresses, if worth their salt, do not wash their hands of responsibility for either. I know a school where attention is paid to manners, and where the children's are delightful; therefore it is not true that manners cannot be taught in a day school. Where the mistresses object to overwork the girls are not overworked: where the mistresses object to bad manners the manners of the girls are not bad. May I suggest that possibly the value of good manners is not always appraised at its proper value by all mistresses in High Schools?

It is always well to define what one is writing about, and by good manners in a girl I understand, above all, a deferential tone in speaking to every one except her intimates, and a pleasant tone to them; eyes that meet the eyes of the person speaking to her, intelligently and modestly; and the habit of smiling when speaking. Our girls have such a terrible habit of unsmilingness! If I cross the Channel, and see the maidens of France and Germany, they are always ready to smile when they speak as a matter of second nature; while the British girl (whom I love dearly) holds her lips stony and grim. If I suggest a more cheerful aspect, the reply is usually, "I didn't feel inclined to smile," as if that settled the matter. Poor little dears! they fortify themselves with the pleasing fiction that it is insincere to try to look as you don't feel. An old lady in my youth used to say, "My dear, look pleasant if you don't feel so"; and I believe that men of